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ABSTRACT

Trust is an important construct in understanding the social dynamics in interpersonal and race relations. Several studies have concluded that blacks tend to mistrust both whites and the predominantly white government. The consensus among theorists and researchers supports the social learning view that accumulated life experiences critically determine the individual's level of trust and mistrust. More significantly, past experiences with individuals or reference groups influence the level of trust or mistrust in relation to those individuals or groups. Racial prejudices and biases are most apparent to those victimized and such biases influence the level of mistrust in interracial interactions. The tendency to define normality as whatever tendencies occur most frequently in the population and abnormality as those traits that occur less frequently disregards legitimate cultural variations and imposes white norms as the standard for judging minorities in such areas as intelligence testing, achievement tests, and personality inventories. While cultural mistrust may not necessarily contribute directly to psychopathology, it may contribute indirectly to the decline of both the physical and the psychological well-being of individuals. A sense of racial injustice, inequity, and racial mistrust and suspicion produces a level of stress and physical symptomatology particularly central to our understanding of the level of wellness in black Americans. (NRB)

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"Cultural Mistrust as a Contributor to Mental Health and Psychopathology"

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"Cultural Mistrust as a Contributor to Mental Health and Psychopathology"

Trust is a very important and useful psychological variable and theoretical construct in understanding the social dynamics in interpersonal relations and race relations. Trust is a unique construct that characterizes the nature and quality of interpersonal relations rather than aspects of the self system or a "personality trait." Until recently trust as a psychological variable has not neen appreciably researched as a crucial influence and dynamic of social and inter-racial relations. The primary purpose of this paper is to 1) explore some of the plausible determinants of trust and mistrust, 2) to examine the implications for interpersonal and interracial relations, and 3) explore the usefulness and appropriateness of trust as a personality construct and index of mental health and psychopathology.

Trust vs. Mistrust: Racial Differences

The late 60's was an era markedly characterized by a significant research focus on the dynamics of inter-racial relations. Grier and Cobbs' (1968) social analysis of the plight of Blacks in American society advanced the notion that Blacks have a tendency to distrust Whites. Grier and Cobbs (1968) state that minorities are often reared under different norms and have been consistently victims of oppression in a racial society thus may have a legitimate right to be suspicious and distrustful of White society. This so-called "paranoid" orientation is a functional rather than a dysfunctional mechanism used by Blacks to protect themselves from possible physical and psychological harm. This observation was consistent with a developing body of literature examining Black and White differences on political cynicism Sears (1967) and Jennings (1967) reported results of a nationwide sample of 2062 high school seniors. Sears reports 79 percent of the White respondents were characterized as having "more faith and confidence" in the national

government (Jennings, 1967), while Black respondents from Watts, approximately 58 percent thought the federal government did "the best job for you and your problems (Sears, 1967). Similarly, a matched subsample of Blacks and Whites were surveyed regarding their expectations of equal treatment from police and bureaucrats, as much as 90 percent of Whites expected equal treatment, whereas only 49 percent of Blacks surveyed expected to be treated equally. Exactly 50 percent of the sample of Black Watts residents said they "trusted" elected officials, while 79 percent of Whites sampled did (Morris & Jefferies, 1967; Sears, 1967). It is noteworthy to point out that more of the Black respondents indicated trust in Negro elected officials (62 percent) than in officials in general.

There is a small but noteworthy group of research studies that suggest the level of pessimism among Blacks about White society is not as intense as might be expected. In a 1967 survey published in the Christmas issue of the Boston Globe, Luis Harris reported that 50 percent of the Blacks surveyed believed that "(racial) hate can be removed from people's minds," while only 31 percent of the Whites did. Sears and Tomlinson (1968) reported results of a survey conducted after the Watts riots where 51 percent of the Black Watts sample thought the riot had made Whites more sympathetic to Black problems, and 12 percent felt it had diminished sympathy. Similarly studies conducted by Bearwood (1968) and Brink and Harris (1966) suggested that Blacks are less alienated (in terms of feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness) and have more optimism in the American system. The inconsistency of the findings may reflect a distinctive pattern of political socialization that produces conventional optimism about an opportunity-oriented system and the supporting set of American ideals about government.

Earlier findings (Bearwood, 1968; and Brink and Harris, 1966) of increased optimism and less alienation among Blacks are inconsistent with a substantial body of literature making the opposite predictions. Wolfe (1976) conducted a longitudinal study of trust, anomie and locus of control in United States college students confirming other reports of

increasing alienation among college students. The contention that Blacks are optimistic and less alienated is suspect against the back drop of studies documenting Blacks and other ethnic minorities are more externally oriented on the Rotter Internal - External locus of control scale. Studies (Battle and Rotter, 1963; Lefcourt and Ladwig, 1965, 1966; Scott and Phelan, 1969; Lessing, 1969; and Strickland, 1972) report Blacks and other minorities scoring more externally reflecting loss of a sense of control (i.e. powerlessness). Similarly, Hamsher, Geller, and Rotter (1968) observed a significant lack of trust as a correlate of externality. More recent findings (Leon, 1974; Thurber, & Friedli, 1976)support this observation that individuals feeling less powerful or in control also feel less trusting.

The Social climate of the 70's reflected a mood and social disposition of distruct consistent with the 60's for Blacks. Switkin and Gynther (1974) compared the differences of Black and White student activist with non-activist on Rotter's Interpersonal Trust Scale. Their findings revealed Blacks in general were less trusting than Whites and those active Blacks were significantly less trusting than nonactive Blacks. While Whites in general scored higher on the trust measure, there were no significant differences between activists and nonactivists. Terrell and Barrett (1979) surveyed Black and White students, using Rotter's Interpersonal Trust Inventory, and report findings consistent with other studies in this area. More specifically, it was revealed that Blacks scored significantly lower on trust than Whites. Further analysis revealed females to be less trusting than males and respondents of lower socioeconomic status to be less trusting than respondents of higher socioeconomic status. More recent findings in sex differences (Lotsof & Grot, 1973; Smith, Tedeschi, Brown, & Lindskoid, 1973; and Levine, Vilena, Altman, and Nadien, 1976) suggested females are less trusting than males. The pattern of findings in the Terrell & Barrett (1979) study suggest a perspective useful in understanding the psychology of oppression - being on the bottom and in a less than advantageous social position makes it understandable for those less powerful and

with a lesser social advantage to be more careful and vigilant if not less trusting. Studies by Sawyer, Pasewark, Davis, and Fitzgerald (1973) and Rao (1972) support the findings of class and cultural differences on trust.

Determinants of Trust and Mistrust

The general consensus among theorists and empirical researchers working in the area of interpersonal trust supports the view of social learning as a critical determinant of the trust(and mistrust). According to social learning theory, critical aspects of an individual's past experiences, socialization and upbringing as well as one's current experiences influences one's belief system and in turn influences both the level and quality of trust or mistrust in social relations. Accordingly, it is unlikely that individuals may develop dispositional orientations to trust or mistrust void of the forementioned aspect of social learning. Litt (1963) conducted a provocative study of Boston politics which lead to the suggestion that cynicism comes from living in a corrupt world. The length of residence in Boston, as an index of exposure to corrupt politics, was positively correlated to political cynicism and mistrust. Local governments, especially, are often corrupt ones, and are not generally trusted very much. Blacks tend on the whole to be less trusting of local government than Whites (Morris & Jeffries, 1967; Sears, 1967, & Jennings, 1967).

The nature of one's experience with a given reference group will critically determine the extent of trust or mistrust an individual may feel toward that reference group. Terrell and Terrell (1981) make the point especially clear in the finding of a study of Black youth whose inter-racial experiences in education, interpersonal relations, business and work, and politics and law were analyzed in relation to their levels of mistrust. It was found that young Black subjects with a high exposure to racial discrimination had higher mistrust scores than those with lower exposure to racial discrimination. Similar findings by Schwarz and Brand (1983) examining the level of trust in young women

with varied attitudes and awareness about rape. Their results showed that women whose awareness regarding rape as a social issue was relatively high were less trusting than those women with relatively little awareness of the social issues. Lockhart (1981) speaks of many problems inherent in White and American Indian relations. Lockhart argues the relations between American Indian people and Anglo-Americans throughout history have proven the foundation for a type of distrust that goes beyond the one-to-one distrust. There is a historic distrust and betrayal that must be recognized and dealt with. Supportive evidence provided by Hillman (1979) and Hake and Schmid (1981) emphasizes the detrimental effect of historical inequity and betrayal on the acquisition and maintenance of trust in interpersonal relations.

Racism: Fact Not Fantasy

Barrett (1981) documents the pervasiveness of racism and racial discrimination in a variety of segments of American society and argues that these experiences for the minority individual represent significant stimuli for stress. The impact of racism is evident at the point of entry in the labor market as evident by historical trends restricting the vocational choices of Blacks to agriculture, ministry, and education prior to the 60's and the implementation of affirmative action. John Fleming (1980) in an analysis of the impact of the affirmative action policy on the education and subsequent integration of Blacks in the labor market, concludes that the remedial action has been minimally effective in addressing the American legacy of separate but inferior education for Blacks, systematic racism with the labor market, gross inequity in wages, economic disparity, residential segregation, discrimination in the political sphere including gerrymandering and outright disenfranchisement. Considerable evidence further documents the limited access of Blacks to quality education and vocational training for job readiness and other benefits of the American dream. Barrett (1981) argues that the conspicuous absence of Black role models in nontraditional vocational areas acts as a "psychological barrier" to young people considering these fields. The Ford Foundation conducted a study in 1969 reporting since the awarding of the first doctorate in 1866, less than one

percent of all Americans earned doctorates were held by Blacks, and less than one percent of all doctoral candidates were Black. In response to the affirmative action policy and the civil rights movement of the '60's predominantly White institutions had expanded their requirement of Black undergraduates, but not as dramatically in the graduate and professional schools. Turner (1980) reveals the link between family finances and the cost of higher education and professional schools to be specifically restrictive for non-Whites. Discrimination and the unavailability to resourceful career and educational counselors further restricts the options for minorities (June & Fooke, 1980). According to the 1975 biannual survey initiated by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) regarded as the first most comprehensive national survey of employment patterns in higher education to date, Blacks were significantly over represented in the lower levels of employment in educational institutions surveyed restricted to service and maintenance occupations. Welch (1967) reported individual earning functions estimated from the 1960 census showing for Non-Whites considerably lower increments to earning from additional schooling and experience. Blood and Hulin (1967) found that pay was a significant determinant of job satisfaction, alienation and morale. Barrett (1981) reported results of the 1981 U.S. Census Bureau showing that Blacks are three times more likely to be below the poverty level and constitute 36.6% of the poverty group.

One potential vehicle to increased income is upward job mobility via on the job training for career advancement. Black men in the 1970's were observed to receive significantly less on-the-job training than their White counterparts (Lazaar, 1979), Slocum and Strauser (1972) conducted a national survey of job attitudes of Certified Public Accountants (CPA's) and included "virtually every Black CPA in the U.S." and reported that Blacks as a whole were more dissatisfied than other CPA's with their careers due primarily to restrictions on their potential for advancement in CPA firms. Kipnis, Silverman, and Copeland (1973) found that Black employees reported to be treated less favorably than Whites. Robert Vecchio (1980) conducted a national survey of 2,569 full-time male workers to assess the extent of

job satisfaction and worker alienation. Vecchio reported a highly significant race difference in his findings that Blacks in general were less educated, relative to Whites, held jobs with lower occupational prestige, expressed less job satisfaction, and felt more alienated. In addition to racial discrimination excluding Blacks from quality educational opportunities, equal integration in the labor market earning equal pay. Terpstra and Larsen (1980) report that race is a critical determinant on hiring and job placement decisions. Their findings show that Blacks were more likely to receive significantly higher hirability and salary assignment ratings for "Black type" jobs, (e.g. building custodian) while Whites were rated more favorably than Blacks for the "White type" job (e.g. machine operators). Heistand (1964) reports that White males were more likely to progress to management level positions while Blacks tend to be restricted to lower level positions.

Empirical studies documenting the influence of racial biases on interpersonal perceptions in the work environment are equally dramatic. When Blacks are in positions of supervision and authority, White supervisors were rated significantly higher than Black supervisors on several dimensions inspite of their equal abilities and qualifications in a variety of areas. Barrett (1981) also reported Black supervisors experiencing more subordinate resistance and challenges of their authority by especially White subordinates as an issue of "perceived competence". Terrell and Terrell developed an inventory specifically designed to measure cultural mistrust among Blacks in the domains of Education and Training - Interpersonal relations, Business and Work, and Politics and Law. Empirical studies conducted with the scale confirm the view that accumulated life experiences and exposure to racial discrimination and injustice is significantly correlated with cultural mistrust (i.e. the tendency to mistrust Whites).

In summary, racial prejudices and biases are pervasive in American society and most apparent to those victimized. The socio-historical legacy of inequity and injustice is a critical factor influencing the level of manifest mistrust in inter racial interactions (Hake & Schmid, 1981; Schmid & Hake, 1983). Beard (1982) documents the importance of accumulated

life experiences on one's level of trust, revealing a decrease in the level of interpersonal trust as age increases. One's experiences shape one's world view and the individual approach to that subjective and phenomenological reality (Wober, 1978; House & Wolfe, 1978).

Trust/Mistrust as a Determinant of Mental Health or Psychopathology

The foremention ed empirical research is supportive of the Social learning view that accumulated life experiences shape and critically determine the individual's level of trust or mistrust. More significantly, past experiences with individuals and/or reference groups influence the level of trust and mistrust in relation to those individuals or reference groups (Terrell & Barrett, 1979; Terrell & Terrell, 1981; Barrett, 1981.) Accordingly, the level of trust or mistrust does not develop in a vacuum but critically depends upon the nature of the relationship shared with others. From a conceptual perspective, the level of trust characterizes the interactive quality of the relationship. If one judges mistrust to be undesirable or pathological, it perhaps is more often a reflection of the nature of the relationship with others. The tendency to label the less trusting individual as pathological is often a reflection of our societal value of trust as more socially desirable and acceptable than mistrust. Labeling the individual as pathological perpetuates the societal game of blaming the victim, when in fact the individual's past psycho-history of inequity and betrayal only reinforces and functionally supports his/her disposition to be distrusting (Hake & Schmid, 1981; Schmid & Hake, 1983).

Trust has been empirically studied in relationship to the belief in a just world by Zuckerman and Gerbasi (1977). Their findings reveal that subjects with a high level of belief in a just world were more trusting and less suspicious of deception and mistreatment. Accumulated life experiences characterized by fair and equitable treatment understandably predisposes the individual to believe in justice and fairness and trust. Grutman & Lion (1982) argues further that it is understandable that low

trusters are more vigilant and watchful. Similar findings by Wright, Maggied, and Palmer (1975) indicate that low trusters are more suspicious than high trusters. Julian Rotter (1980) examined the relationship between interpersonal trust, trustworthiness, and gullibility and concludes that high trusters are more gullible than low trusters. Rotter defines gullibility as naiveté or foolishness and trust is defined as a belief in others in the absence of clear-cut reasons to disbelief. It is therefore consistent with this empirical research and the related theoretical assumptions that individuals whose past experiences gives them reason to be less gullible that they should behave accordingly.

Researchers Kardiner and Ovessey (1951) have suggested that a lack of trust is indicative of an unhealthy personality, while Grier and Cobbs (1968) in their indepth social-psychological analysis of the plight of Blacks in American socity argue that cultural mistrust (i.e. the tendency to mistrust Whites) is a healthy and adaptive survival response. The lack of a paranorm among minorities may be more indicative of pathology than its presence. The absence of a paranorm in minorities may indicate poor reality testing or denial of racial oppression in society (Sue, 1981). There is general agreement among social theorists that trust is an essential component of interpersonal relations, and a lack of trust often has a detremental effect on the acquisition and maintenance of healthy interpersonal relations. However most research studies (Lotsof & Grot, 1973; Terrell & Terrell, 1981; Terrell & Barrett, 1979; Switkrin & Gynther, 1974) show that the individuals victimized by inequity and betrayal are most likely to be distrusting rather than the harm doer. If the relationship is unhealthy and promotes an "unhealthy" disposition of suspicion and distrust in the victim rather than the harm doer, labeling the victim excuses the status quo of those relationships and places blame and the responsibility of rehabilitation on the victim. Numerous studies documenting the success and failure rates in psychotherapy (Johnson & Noonan, 1972; Roark, 1974; Roussos, 1983) consistently emphasizes the importance of relational therapy in rebuilding trust as a linkage between the persons

in the relationship. Attempts to label and treat one individual are minimally effective and inappropriate.

A statement of caution is of utmost importance in research examining relational outcomes between Blacks and Whites and the often unfavorable conclusions drawn about Blacks. Terrell, Terrell, and Taylor (1981) and Terrell, Taylor, and Terrell (1978) examined the effects of the race of the examiner and levels of mistrust of Whites on intelligence tests performance. These results reveal that when Blacks are tested by White examiners the intelligence test scores were lower and significantly correlated to cultural mistrust. However, when Blacks were tested by a Black examiner, the scores improved significantly (Terrell, Terrell & Taylor, 1981). The race factor and the cultural mistrust variable may prove to be very valuable to future researchers challenged by the historical legacy of race differences that support pathology or deficiencies in Blacks (Loehlin, Lindzey & Spuhla, 1975). McQuarter (1981) demonstrates the race factor and mistrust of Whites as an insightful link explaining the historical trend in the literature for Black children to show a lower delay of gratification response in the delay of gratification studies (Strickland, 1972). Much of our understanding of the psychology of Blacks is biased by the confound of race of examiners and the associated role of cultural mistrust in assessment derived from those interpersonal relations. All too often the conclusions suggest pathology or deficiencies in the Black populations studied (Loehlin, Lindzey & Spuhler, 1975).

It is most central to this discussion to carefully and reflectively examine our conceptual approach to judging "normality". Within the mental health profession there is a historical trend to rigidly define normality as a universal concept. The tendency to define normality as whatever tendencies occur most frequently in the population and abnormality as those traits or attributes that occur less frequently has glaring deficiencies. The result is that White standards and norms are imposed and become the standard of judging minorities as in intelligence testing, achievement tests and personality inventories (Sue, 1981). Although this criterion approach is widely used, it actually places the culturally

different at a disadvantage and deviations from the White middle-class norm are considered abnormal. The continued dogmatic adherence to some universal notion of abnormality disregards legitimate cultural variations critically linked to understanding the social and cultural milieu in which individuals develop, function, and must survive.

It is the position of the author, that while cultural mistrust may not necessarily contribute directly to psychopathology, it may contribute in meaningful ways perhaps indirectly mediated via related processes to the decline of both physical and psychological well being of individuals. Schill, Toves, & Ramanaich (1980) report that subjects scoring low in trust had higher stress scores and reported more emotional and physical distresss. Findings by Heretick (1981) and Barrett (1981) support this view. A sense of racial injustice, inequity and racial mistrust and suspicion produce a level of stress and physical symptomatology particularly central to our understanding of the level of wellness in Black Americans.

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